

## [Ella Bartlett]

1/20/[?] No.4

Name: Louise G. Bassett

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Brookfield

Topic: Ella Bartlett

"Will you let me come in for a little visit or are you busy?" I asked Ella Bartlett as she opened the door, incidentally, like a thunder cloud. W. Mass. 1938-9

"No. no, come right in, I'm right glad to see you but I'm not fit company for nobody, dead or alive. I'm jes' regular 'mean-cross', mean as two pins an' crosser then a whole paper of 'em. Come in if you think you can stand me, I won't be nice an' don't you expect I will."

I went in, delighted to get hold of Ella Bartlett, in a "mean-cross" frame of mind, for usually when she feels that way, she talks. She is what is called a "sometimey" person, some times she talks but more often she doesn't - but - if she is annoyed at anything she is very "chattey".

Today she is evidently good and mad and something has happened to upset her.

"Tell me, who has done 'what' to you?"

"Don't you hate to hear some one beat an' beat on a drum. Don't it send you nearly insane? Bobby, the lad next door, had a drum give him for Christmas an' he beats it every

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one of his wakin' seconds an' his mother never stops him, no matter if the neighbors is goin' crazy an' that's what I'm doin' this minute.

"But what has got me riled up is, jest a while back I heard th' thing goin' like mad. It wan't bein' played like Bobby plays it. It was jest a kind of loud tum-tum-tum, like as if a 2 stick was beatin' on the side of th' drum - you know th' wood side. It didn't have no tune, they was no sense to it, 'twant even keepin' time.

"I was so ragin' mad I jest fell down th' stairs, I was goin' to spring out at Bobby an' box his ears good for him an' lan' sakes 'twant Bobby 'tall. It was his father, playin' soldier - think on it - an' he was shoutin' out orders an' if you could tell it from th' bark of a dog, you're pretty smart, let me tell you."

"Did you box his ears?"

"No, of course not? He said, 'Good mornin' smilin' - like, but I held onto myself. I know he was only doin' it jest to make me mad an' th' Lord knows he succeeded."

It seemed best to change this conversation. "What you been doing today, reading - sewing?" I asked.

"No, I ben' tryin' to finish this wreath but I'm so het up I can't work. It takes a steady hand an' I ain't got one today, it takes a heap of patience, too. Did you ever see th' one I did when I was a girl. This is it, kind-a pretty - huh?"

It is really a very lovely thing, a wreath of delicately colored flowers in an oval mahogany frame, which was lovely in itself.

"You see all these little flowers are made of hair. Here's rose buds, pink, you see to harmonize with these white lillies an' these here pansies an' here's some acorns an' along here's some ivy an' here's some sweet alyssum.

"I made it all out of hair that was my folks an' some of my friends. It took a good many locks of 'em. This is some of my great grand mother's hair - pretty, wan't it? Grandmother had a lock of her mother's hair. You know folks years ago always gave a lock of their hair to th' ones they loved - suitors most always gave it to their girls.

"This little forget - me - not was grandmother's hair. That white lilli lily over there was th' hair of a friend's of my mother. Her hair was a lovely white an' I wanted some awful bad an' one day I got th' courage to ask her for a lock. I kind-a expected she might be mad but she seemed real pleased to think I wanted it. It worked in real nice, don't you think?

"These acorns are Maria Stone's hair - school chum of mine. I used to color some of th' hair, I'd wet th' leaves of artificial flowers an' it dyed 'em real natural, didn't they? It's funny, but there's only one person alive whose hair is in that wreath an' some of 'em was two or three years younger then me.

"It was an awful sight of work but 'twan't so hard after I got th' hang of it. Many a night I dreamt of makin' flowers all night long. This oval frame is elegant, too, isn't it? Do you know I believe I had a real knack doin' hair wreaths when I was a girl. I jest begun this one, maybe I'll never finish it. 'twouldn't surprise me if I didn't."

"Of course you'll finish it." My voice sounded abnormally cheerful. It was time to change the conversation again.

"Tell me, Miss Ella, how old were you when you began having beaus?"

"Oh, suz, I couldn't think back that far. Let me think, well, when I was a little girl I had a boy who liked me. Steve was his name, he sat back of me in school, used to bring me apples an' pears an' would pull my braids. That was a sign of affection, I can see that when I look back now.

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"We used to go to dancin' school. A dancin' teacher came once a week. I think his name was Nutt. - an' yet that don't sound jes' right neither. He was quite fat but I never have seen any one so light on their feet an' so graceful. I can see him now - he would play his violin an' do th' steps an' count, one-two-three-four, all at th' same time.

"Oh, we had such good times those days. This boy who liked me, Steve, one day at school asked me to go sleigh ridin' one Saturday mornin' an' I said I would. I told my mother an' she didn't say I could an' I was sure she'd let me. Well, I got all ready an' waited an' waited but no boy showed up. It was my first experience at bein' held up an' was I mad.

"When I went to dancin' school that afternoon - we had dancin' school on Saturday afternoons - he met me at th' door. I remember I shook my fist at him an' he hurried to tell me th' horse was sick an' he was afraid to take her out. I forgot to tell you Steve was thirteen an' I was twelve.

"Well, of course, I tried to believe him but his mother told my mother that he had driven up to th' house as big as life an' she 5 wouldn't let him come for me 'because we was such babies". His mother was in our black books for a long time after that. I remember I scarcely spoke to her at all for at least three or four months an' when I did speak I was, oh, very cold, which as I look back at it now must have amused her mightily.

"Those dancin' school afternoons were such fun. It was a class of 'dancin' an' ball room deportment' an' we had twelve lessons for five dollars, which to some was great extravagance an' some thought it wicked, 'ruinin' th' children', they said.

"It was fun to see th' boys come up an' put their right hand on their heart an' make a low bow - they was so awkward - an' say, 'May I have th' pleasure of this waltz' or polka or schottishe or whatever it might be. An' if you didn't like th' boy you'd take your time gettin' up an' you knew he'd have loved to have yanked you up but he didn't dare.

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"We danced quadrilles an' square dances an' reels - such fun - an' when th' winter was over we'd finish with a grand 'ball'. Some boy would write you a note, probably hand it to you hisself, askin' you to go with him to th' ball an' then th' night of th' grand occasion he'd drive up in one of th' town's hacks. We had two in town an' were they busy that night, for even if it was only a block you had to drive up to th' door in a hack.

"The boy an' you'd each have your shoes in a box under your arm. Everything was very formal an' as unlike today as it could be.

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I can remember I always felt I was somebody else an' not th' little devil that would be stickin' out her tongue at this same little boy at school th' next day.

"Although I was small I wasn't a very good dancer but my mother had taught me I must dance with every one who asked me - no matter if they did walk all over my feet, an' since some of th' girls wouldn't look at th' bad dancers, I got asked every dance. I guess I was kind-a amiable those days, which is more'n can be said for me these days.

"I had a uncle who thought th' world of me, who used to say, 'I don't care what you all say, Ella's got the disposition of a angel.' Goodness suz, I'm glad he can't see me now. He made some kind of a thing for skates, made considerable money, too and left me a piece of it but I ain't got none of it now.

"He didn't have much schoolin' but he could do most anything. He could doctor you better'n any doctor in town. The second he looked at you he knew if you was comin' down with measles or whoopin' cough or scarlet fever or anything. He made medicines out of herbs, tasted good, too.

"An' he could give you such good advice, he kept me from bein' foolish one time. I believe that is what first started him bein' interested in me. He was away for a while an' I wrote

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him a letter an' when he died they found my letter among his papers carefully folded in the portemonnaie that had his most important papers."

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"hat was the letter about, can you tell me?"

"Course, I don't mind, it was when I wanted to leave home. Wait, I guess maybe I can lay my hands onto it now." After some searching, the letter was produced. "Here, you can read it, no, maybe I better. It starts, 'Uncle Mine,' that give you a idea how silly I was.

"Well, anyway, here's th' rest of it. 'A crisis has come into my life. I have made up my mind to leave home an' live by myself. My home circle stifles me, I cannot breathe, I cannot sleep or eat, I am miserably unhappy an' will continue to be a wreck unless this unhappy existence ends. I am very, very lonely. There is nothing so terrible as aloneness, may you never have it to endure. I don't know how I came by my artistic temperament but it is there. I am goin' to write a book, th' family are fully cognizant of this but I receive no sympathy - no understandin'. If I am to create there must be silence in my soul an' if I am to write truly of life in th' raw I must see life. Father has forbidden my doin' many things that would widen my viewpoint, so I have decided to leave home. Will you tell me what I had better do, where I can earn a livin' an' yet have enough time to finish my literary efforts.

"I will be largely guided by your opinion, I know you love me an' will understand an' help me in my great need. Tell me Uncle George why does one's family always have to fail to understand an' do not sympathize with the family's genius? Your lovin' niece, Ella.

"I guess I stole everything I ever laid my eyes on an' put it in that letter."

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"It is certainly some letter," I remarked, "where did you go, what did you do to earn your living and did you ever write your book?"

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"I stayed at home, of course, an' was most unhappy an' enjoyed it. I didn't smile or laugh if I could possibly help it - I was so, so sorry for myself. Uncle George came back to stay an' brought me some of th' prettiest pink silk you ever laid your eyes onto for a dress. He paid for havin' it made up for me, I never had anything so nice an' I forgot all about bein' misunderstood an' all th' rest of it.

"Uncle George was awful good to me from that day till he died an' as I said he left me considerable when he died.

"I'll show you a picture of me in that dress if you want to see what it looked like. I got two proposals different times when I was wearin' that dress. See, here 'tis, that's real lace in those sleeves an' that jabot around my neck was pretty, wan't it? Th' first time I wore it was at Easter. We had a ball, I never said a word about it to any of th' girls an' I made Miss Slavin - that was th' dressmaker here in town - she's dead now - solemnly swear not to tell a livin' soul about it an' she didn't an' when I got to th' ball, I went late on purpose, all th' girls got around me an' we spent so much time talkin' about th' dress, how it was made an' Uncle George an' all, that the boys got kind-a vexed with me. An' want some of th' girls jealous - some on 'em were real 'catty'.

"I had some awful happy times in that pink dress, I wore it till it was a string. Makes me blue to think on it."

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"You must have had a good time. What else did you / do for fun?" I asked. [#?]

"Oh, we went skatin' in winter, though I never was much for sports, an' sleigh ridin', things like that, an' picnics an' such in summer. I was afraid of snakes an' spent most of my time settin' in a buggy when I was out in th' woods, so, things like that didn't mean so much to me.

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"In th' fall we used to some times have apple parin' bees, that's what they called 'em. We had a funny one once. Did you ever hear of Mary E. Wilkins." \*

I said I had, though I didn't know very much about her writings.

"Well, I've been told she wrote something about that bee but she didn't use th' right name of th' folks that give it an' she didn't say it was here but she does say in two, three of her stories, about Ware, so I guess she may have got some ideas from all these little towns, though I don't say for sure."

"What was so funny about the apple paring bee?"

"Well we used to all get together, them that was invited mean an' th' men would pare an' th' women an' girls mostly strung. We always had to wear aprons for it was apt to spoil what we was wearin'. One day, th' Hales, had a parin' bee an' we was all asked to it. They had a big, big barn an' lots of animals - cows an' horses. This night th' barn an' stalls was all decorated up so it looked right nice." \* Mary E. Wilkins Freeman?

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"Well, everything was goin' along fine when all at once some one called fire an' sure enough one of th' stalls was a fire. It seems one of th' lads was payin' more attention to one of th' girls then another girl wanted him to an' this girl was dancin' around an' carryin' on tryin' to draw attention to herself. While she was dancin' she was flippin' her apron around an' it knocked one of th' lanterns down an' that started a fire quicker'n you could say it. The men got at it right off an' put it out, but th' smell of smoke an' th' water an' all put a end to th' bee.

"Mr. an' Mrs. Hale was terrible upset but pretty soon they said 'come an' have supper'. So, we filed in but all there was on that big table was two big dishes of dried peaches, two big platters of bread an' a pie an' nothing else come.

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"Th' peaches was awful good an' so was th' bread but th' pie didn't go far. Two, three of th' girls who liked Eugene Downs awful well was so busy seein' that he got pie that only a few even saw it.

"Well, things was so upset that we thought we better go an' after we all got our wraps an' was ready, Mrs. Hale said - 'Why you ain't had any supper' an' sure enough we hadn't none of th' things she had got ready. So nothing would do but we had to stay an' eat so we took off our things an' filed into supper again an' in all your born days you never saw so much food.

"There was hot baked beans, chicken pie, cold ham an' tongue an' corn beef, hot biscuits an' muffins, all sorts of pies an' 11 cakes an' tea an' coffee an' pickles an' cole slaw, everything you could think of. An' to think we almost missed it."

For some time I had been hearing a familiar sound but since Ella was unconscious of any outside disturbance I said nothing but by now there was no hiding the fact that the enemy was upon us. The drums were coming our way - Ella Bartlett without further ado flew down the stairs and out the door and the last I saw and heard was, that Miss Ella was not winning the war.